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Biking community continues to grow

BY JOHN MARTIN FEY WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Kent McNeill doesn't just sell and service bicycles, he's a competitive rider. Has been for 14 years.

"I started in 1994," McNeill said, "during my first year in college at UNO."

McNeill, owner of High Gear in La Vista's Brentwood Square, is one of many Nebraskans who enjoys competitive cycling. He's seen the sport increase in popularity.

"Overall, as a sport," he said, "it definitely has grown. The 1990s was the mountain bike era.

"Over the years, that kind of has tapered down a little bit. Now we're just starting to see a resurgence in the mountain bike scene."

Lance Armstrong's successful run at the Tour de France helped boost interest in cycling, McNeill said, and it continued to grow after Armstrong's retirement.

"We had a record participation at last weekend's River City Shootout at Swanson Park (in Bellevue)," he said.

Matt Landen, left, and Eric Kenney at the 2008 Spring Cycling Classic Criterium in Lincoln.

McNeill rides with Midwest Cycling Community, one of several clubs in eastern Nebraska. His club has more than 250 members in Omaha, Kansas City and St. Louis.

"There are quite a few (clubs)," he said. "Out of all the clubs, we probable are the largest. There is a healthy competition between the clubs. But we all work together for the good of the sport."

Competitive cycling events are staged throughout the Midwest, and novice racers needn't feel intimidated, McNeill said. Nearly all events are divided into age groups and ability classes.

Cyclists are also looking to help those who use bicycles for fitness and as an alternate form of transportation.

McNeill is assisting with Monday's 2008 Mayor's Bicycle Ride, which kicks off the national Bike to Work week.

The event at 33rd and California Streets starts at 8:30 a.m. with Mayor Mike Fahey announcing a new bike loop project. After his remarks, cyclists will take a three-mile ride to the Missouri River pedestrian bridge and return to the starting point.

For more information on the ride, go to www.activateomaha.org.

Bicycle Commuter Challenge

Activate Omaha will be holding the third annual Omaha Metro Bicycle Commuter Challenge starting May 12, 2008.

This year's BCC kicks off with the Mayor's Bicycle Ride on Monday at 8:30 a.m. at 33rd and California Streets.

Last year's participants logged more than 109,000 miles with a savings of about \$13,800 in gas.

For more information about rides and races: www.nebraskacyclingnews.com

For information about rides in Iowa: www.bikeiowa.com.